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IONE







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A TALE OF EPHESUS

By JAMES S. PARK

SUGGESTED BY EDWIN LONG'S PAINTING "CHRIST OR DIANA"

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I.



N days of seedtime of the Christian faith,

When men were seeking everywhere for light,

Or clasping old traditions close, there lived At Ephesus a venerable Greek Called Ctesiphon. The changing years had left

Their grief as well as gladness in his heart;
His life-long friend, Antonius of Rome,
Coming on business ventures, year by year,
Had been persuaded, ere his last return,
To leave awhile his young son, Marius;
But midway in the voyage the treacherous
wind

Whirled the calm ripples into angry waves, And driving his galley hard upon the rocks, Sunk it, with all on board. The sad news came

Months afterward to the Ephesian home, And music changed to mourning. But the boy

Was loved and cherished by his father's friend,

And hardly did he know his orphanage Till his adoption. Soon he had become The dear companion in all pleasant hours Of the three sisters, younger than himself, Ione, Lesbia, and Pelope.

Gay, eager rivals were they in the search
For the first wild-flowers after winter's
snows;

They watched the kingly eagle, floating high, Or wondered at the rainbow's radiant arch, Or roaming in the dim old forest, learned Secrets of birds and bees, of trees and moss;

They sailed their mimic fleets upon the stream,

While sitting down, they cut long, hollow stalks,

And breathing in them brought forth mellow tones;

Or chased, with ringing laughter, playful goats

Around the field, till flushed and out of breath,

They sank down panting in the fragrant grass;

And many another pastime filled the days'
Deep chalice to the brim with sparkling
wine.

Five happy years went by on shining wings; Then came a change, as Marius was of age For Roman schooling, as Antonius wished, In eloquence, and arms, and government, At the world's capital. Darker seemed the house,

And dimmed the sunshine over all the land, When he had left them, after long farewells. Ione wandered restlessly about, Missing her leader in a hundred ways,

Till marking how a cloud enwrapped the hearts

Of father, mother, sisters, even the slaves, She strove by thoughtful, gentle ministry To bring back smiles and gladness. Day by day

Their loss was lessened, and she took his place,

As far as might be, to depending ones.

Then letters came, as months and years rolled on,

Telling of progress, with a glow of pride In deeds of ancient days, and how he burned

Already to be leader of a host
In some great enterprise. Ione felt
A thrill of sympathy with all his thought,
And treasured up the words like precious
gems,

Because he wrote them.

But a dark-browed Guest Was daily drawing nearer to the house Unbidden, till at length they heard a knock lone. 9

Imperious, and he entered, took the hand Of wife and mother in his chilling clasp, And she whose life was closely twined with theirs,

Making one harp-string, sounding full and sweet,

Passed into silence, with the voiceless shades.

Then Ctesiphon's sad, desolated heart,
Too tender for his grim philosophy,
Would not be comforted, but wandered out
Into the darkness, asking for some strong
Assurance of an endless, unseen life,
With re-united souls, but all in vain.
Ione nobly strove again to fill
A place made vacant, but her weight of grief
Was overpowering sometimes, till she slipped
Away from all, and wept despairingly.
The younger children felt the sudden shock
Less keenly, and their spirits soon revived,
Till sunshine almost filled their restless
hearts,

Save in the father's presence, when they

How slow his step, how sorrowful his face, Where grief had ploughed deep furrows in the brow,

And scattered ashes on his hair and beard, Until it seemed that in the space of months Long years had passed; instinctively they hushed

Their laughter then, and spoke in lower tones.

So the dull days crept on with folded wings; The sun, retreating toward the southern pole,

Was sometimes hid from sight by leaden clouds,

And chilly winds began to blow from seas And eastern deserts, heralds of the stern Gray monarch Winter; soon the shivering

Lay bound in icy fetters, and no voice From Nature's myriad summer tongues could speak

Of coming life and beauty, — all was death.

II.

HREE times had Winter's scepter ruled the earth,

And thrice been broken by the hand of Spring;

But by a shorter way than Nature knew The guide Necessity was bringing forth The woman in Ione ere her years,

And many a grace, unseen by radiant sun Of youth and gladness, blossomed in the night

Of sorrow, like some lovely snow-white flower

That shuns the glare of daytime. When she passed

Along the public ways, her floating hair And downcast, dark-fringed eyes and quiv-

ering lips

Compelled attention; many turned about For second glance, and murmured, "Beautiful!"

But one there was, the proud Neocritus,
High-priest of great Diana, whose bold gaze
Respected not her shrinking. Openly
He led a righteous life, but down beneath
Lay smouldering an evil, passionate heart,
Whose fires flamed red in secret. But few
dared

A whisper of dark deeds supposed or known,

Because the priest was powerful; his command

A law supreme. Many a priestess fair Serving within the temple, was the tool Or partner of his sin. And having marked Ione's beauty, all his varied arts Of soft persuasion were arrayed to win The maiden to this virgin company, As the lithe serpent seeks to lure the bird With fiery, flashing eyes and graceful coils, Till the poor victim flutters helplessly, The strange, wild fascination having dulled The sense of danger.

But Ione's soul

Beheld unceasingly the mother's face Through mist of tender memory; father's age

And sister's youth required her loving care, And one she saw in dreams, she doubted not

Would some day come again. Besides she felt

A vague, unreasoning fear, and strong dislike

As often as she met Neocritus.

Yet answer absolute she dared not give,

And trembling, pleaded longer time for thought,

Whereat the priest, though chafing inwardly, Forebore to press his purpose; better far A future favorite than present slave!

One day Ione, with a heavy heart,
Was passing listlessly along the way
To some secluded spot, when brokenly
A sound of reading reached her, and the
voice,

Low-toned at first, yet thrilled exultingly, As if the reader felt a climax come,—

A fair, white dayspring,— and his waiting soul

Rose like a lark to meet it. Drawing near The open door, she listened eagerly:—

"I would not have you to be ignorant, Brethren, concerning them that are asleep, So that ye sorrow not, as others do Which have no hope."

("Ah!" sighed Ione, "I

Am one of those; what hope can come to me?")

Again she listened: -

" For the Lord himself

Shall come down out of heaven with a shout,

The voice of the archangel, and the trump Of God; thereat the dead in Christ shall first

Arise, then we which are alive shall all Be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord And be forever with him!"

Here she turned

And swiftly walked away with burning face.

Surely this was the Christian sect, despised By all her people, — in her father's words, "A Galilean folly, far beneath

The least attention of a thoughtful Greek!"
She did not know that, years before, the flame

Of Christian zeal had spread from house to house,

Kindled by Paul, nor that the words were his

Which she had heard repeated; but they glowed

Within her like the morning star in heaven,

Distant and cold, yet hinting warmth and cheer.

"Great words," she mused, "yet meaningless to me.

Who are 'the dead in Christ,' and how can they

Be raised by any power this poor sect knows?

Nay, I am but a foolish child to think
On such delusions; none can raise the
dead!"

But still the music of that noble voice Lingered within her memory; and a wish That somehow all might be as she had heard

Drew her, almost unconsciously, again

Some days thereafter, to the same low door,

Trembling with shame, though hungering for a hope.

An influence all unguessed was guiding her In ways mysterious to learn of Him,
The All-sufficient One, whose infinite heart,
Forgetting none of heaven's vast multitudes,

Twined round our little earth when time began,

And in far Eden breathed the breath of life Immortal into man, forevermore,— Almighty Love, whose everlasting arms, That hold the whirling universe in place, Are always underneath the fainting souls Of all that seek Him, so that none may sink Into eternal darkness, asking light.

The reading was in progress as she reached The Christian's house, and swiftly glanced around

For watchful, curious eyes. Save for herself The narrow street was now deserted quite, And reassured she listened. Smooth and calm,

In quiet dignity, the reader's words

Flowed like a steady, sunlight-cleaving

stream:—

"God that hath made the world, and all therein,

Seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, Doth not inhabit temples made with hands; Neither can he be worshipped with men's hands,

As if he needed aught, for he hath given To all the breath of life, and all things else,

And made all nations of one common blood,
To dwell on all the earth, and hath ordained
The times before appointed, and their bounds,
That they should seek the Lord, if haply
thus

In feeling they might find him, though he be

Not far from every one of us, because

In him we live and move; in him we
have

Our being, — as your poets also say:
For we are all his offspring. Therefore,
since

Mankind is sprung from God, we ought not think

That Deity is like to graven gold,
Silver, or stone, in forms devised by man.
God hath allowed these times of ignorance,
But now commands repentance everywhere,
Because a day hath been appointed when
The world shall all be judged in righteousness

By one ordained thereto, in sign of which He raised him from the dead."

Ione stood

Lost in a maze of thought, and scarcely heard

Beyond the strange, new words, "We ought not think

That Deity is like to graven gold,

Silver, or stone, in forms devised by man."

That ancient image in the temple came,

So she had learned, from mighty Zeus himself,

Descending through the clouds, in the dim dawn

Of Asian history; who knew if this

Were truth or not? If not, and man had formed

The statue, was it not the poor, weak dream

Of some old artist? Never help had come In answer to her prayers for strength and light

From Artemis; had any ever seen In very truth the high, immortal gods? Did they exist at all, save in the mind Of man, their maker? While she stood, confused With new-born doubts, the little company Had closed their service with a hymn of praise,

And now came forth. But yet she heeded not,

Until a touch aroused her; terrified

She turned, and met the frank, inquiring

eyes

And gentle question of Alcæus, "Child: Art thou in trouble? Let the tender Christ Bear all thy burdens, and uplift thy soul!"

As when the icy bonds of fountains melt, Touched by the morning sunshine, all her pride

Dissolved beneath the sudden sympathy, And the dry valley of her spirit filled To overflow with rush of tears released.

At this he led her to a seat within The little room, and waited for a space Before proceeding; then with questions kind He learned her history.

Some sixty years

Of earthly life Alcæns knew, and yet
Few were the signs of care or weariness;
A steadfast peace dwelt ever in his eyes,
And as he talked with her a heavenly smile
Hovered about his lips, or glorified
At one swift radiance all the upturned face.
Long time they sat there, while the western
sun

Began to gather up his golden robes, And on her spirit fell a strange, sweet calm, As if the Christ had whispered, "Peace, be still!"

At length she rose to go. Taking her hand With all a father's tenderness, he said: "Child, if thy mother never knew the Christ.

For lack of opportunity, and yet
Was heedful of his voice within her heart,
Unconscious whence it came, I may not
doubt

That she has passed through death to Paradise.

For 'how shall they believe on him of whom

They have not heard?' So says the apostle Paul,

And underneath the words I seem to hear The heart-beats of the Father's infinite love And perfect justice sound in harmony.

Nay, more, — one day our Master met a man

Blind from his birth, and asking not for faith,

Put clay upon his eyes; then bade him wash

Within a certain pool, and when he saw,
Declared himself the Son of God, whereat
The man believed and worshipped. And
I know

That one so patient with the earthly eyes, In days when he was in the flesh, is not Less tender to the feeble sight of souls, Now that he reigns in glory. But to thee He giveth more of grace, and stands revealed

To-day in all his beauty; thou hast heard

His words of endless life; believe in him And be at rest and peace forevermore! But yet I would not leave thee unaware Of coming trials, for my uncle heard The great apostle say that grievous wolves Should, after his departure, enter in Among us, sparing not the flock. The words

May mean that we must seal our faith with death,

Even as others; yet remember this,—
Our light affliction for a moment is,
And worketh out a far exceeding weight
Of everlasting glory. Let thy thought
Dwell on these things, and come to us
again

The first day of the week, when thou shalt learn

More of the Saviour; meantime, fare thee well!"

So through the twilight haze Ione went, Slowly and wondering, to her home, and found The place astir with news of Marius, Centurion of a company, on the way To Ephesus, to aid the garrison. And while with various thoughts her heart

And while with various thoughts her heart beat fast,

And flushed her face, and sometimes came a smile

To eyes and lips, as in the former days,
The father watched her, half in bitterness,
And murmured to himself, "Youth soon
forgets!"

But rarely did he ask her of her life,
And seldom had she gone to him for help
Or counsel since the day her mother died,
Because his grief absorbed him. So her
thoughts

Throughout the week were surging to and fro;

But one grand purpose, like a steady ship, Faint on the far horizon, grew more clear And bright and high, as o'er the sea it came,

Though lashed by winds of fear and chilly rain,

With waves of doubt strong dashing at the prow,

Till calmer water at the port it reached,
And in a morning fair, with breezes sweet,
Dropped anchor in the deep, safe harbor,
Christ!

But how to tell the others of her choice, What reasons give beyond their own, or why She had not spoken earlier of her mind,— Perplexed her yet; and while she thought on this,

Up from the plains one sunny morn there came

Faint sounds of martial music, — then appeared

A rolling cloud of dust, with points of light That circled round the roadway's nearest bend,

And slowly rising, thinly veiled the ranks
Of Roman soldiers, marching cityward,—
Each moment nearer, wider, more distinct,
The sunbeams breaking on their burnished
arms

In glittering wavelets, as the rising tide
Crept onward up the slope, until at last
They reached and passed the gates, and
formed within;

Then, while the housetops swarmed with eager groups,

Steadily up the street the column came, With rhythmic step and swaying spears and shields

And waving plumes and ensigns gleaming high

And horses neighing at the trumpet call. Familiar faces all were in the van, —
The city's garrison for many months, —
But closely following their escort marched A company of strangers, whom all eyes Regarded curiously; and at their head, Mounted upon a proud, high-stepping bay, Young Marius, a bronzed Apollo, rode, The promise of his childhood beauty filled To satisfaction by the ripening years; And many knew the face, as on he passed, And shouted friendly greeting; but the man, Erect and flushed, impatient of delay,

Scarce seemed to hear them, while the column wheeled

Into a well-remembered street, and there, Hardly a spear-cast from his hungry eyes, Arose his boyhood's happy, care-free home, The house of Ctesiphon! And as he gazed, Upon the roof appeared the household, all Save one whose gentle face he longed to see, The only mother that he ever knew;

And the quick tears sprang up and veiled his sight,

The while they waved a welcome; then he passed,

Swept onward, as it seemed, by all his men, And blended with the throng, so fading out, Beyond their keenest vision, as they turned And slowly left the roof, Ione last.

How long the day that sunders waiting hearts!

Upon her dial-plate the shadow slept, And Marius, chained by military cares, Looked often to the sun, that seemed to stand Still in the heavens, while a fervent heat
Bore down upon the land, until the breeze
Of morning fled away, as if in fear.
All life breathed hard, and shrank into the
shade,

And when the day king reached his throne of noon

He ruled a silent city.

Hour by hour, High overhead the vault of dazzling blue Shone spotless; then its base began to fade Far to the southward, in a veil of mist, That gathered into feathery, floating clouds, Slow rising upward, and a whisper crept Along the land, a message from the sea, With promise of refreshing by and by.

At last the young centurion was released; And in the waning of the day he sat, Divested of his armor, at the home, And looked again into his dear ones' eyes; Without, a fountain in a spacious court Plashed musically, while the whirring birds

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Dipped down to drink and bathe, and scattered drops

Like diamonds round the basin. Then he told

Of all his life, and answered questions grave

From Ctesiphon, or listened to the talk
Of Lesbia and Pelope with smiles,
But ever glancing where Ione sat,
Was filled with admiration at her face,
Whose glowing eloquence was more than
speech;

And in his heart he whispered, "She is mine!"

But while their souls were swept and stirred and thrilled

To strong, glad harmony by winds of love, The sky was darkening; glancing up they saw

The storm king's sable hosts arrayed for war,—

His fierce, impatient horses snorting fire, Their mighty hoofs upon the firmament, That shook beneath their trampling; then arose

The low, dread rumbling of his chariot wheels.

But in the pause that followed, suddenly Another shadow fell across the floor, And in the archway stood a white-robed form,.—

The priest Neocritus.

Then all arose
In deference to his rank; but with a smile
Less courteous than crafty, he began
Abruptly, as he took the offered seat:
"It may surprise thee, Ctesiphon, to know
The purpose of my coming; yet I trust
That it may give thee pleasure. I have long
Looked favorably upon thine eldest child,
Because the generous gods have dowered her
With graces like Pandora's; and I deemed
Such beauty should adorn the temple courts
Of Artemis, our Lady. To this end
I oft have urged the maiden, but some

I know not what — restrains her from the step;

Wherefore I call thee to assist my words
With reasoning of thine own. A father's
voice

May well be more effectual than mine In setting forth the glory of the choice And honor of the service. This I ask, Not doubting of thy willingness to grant."

But Ctesiphon made answer dignified:
"Thou knowest that my daughters are the stay

And solace of my swift-departing days,
And surely it were better to have asked
For my consent before thou soughtest hers.
Yet think not I am one of those whose
word

Is law unbending to a child's desire;
Ione is of age to know her will,
And she shall have the fullest liberty
To choose her future. Daughter, as thy
wish

Shall be the answer, what hast thou to say?"

Then from her seat Ione rose, and stood
Trembling and pale, but with a firm resolve
To tell them bravely of her new-gained faith.
Twice she essayed to speak, but found no
words,

And in the glimmering, soundless lightning seemed

Some unsubstantial vision, as it lit

Her form and features with unearthly gleams;

And Marius, shuddering, thought of those dim shades

That wander silent through the underworld. At last her answer broke the stillness, low And faltering at first, then gaining strength:

"Father, I thank thee truly, — not alone For these, thy generous words, but for the love

Which thou hast always lavished. But to prove

My gratitude, I can but gladly take
The freedom given. And one thing I have
done.

Sure of thy kindness, which must now be told;

Some other time will serve for questioning, Therefore I ask thy patience.

"Never once

Have I desired to leave thee, but have sought

Instead to be like sunshine in the house, Since that dark day we all remember well; But mine own life was hopeless, till I learned

A better way of living. I have left
The ancient faith, unsatisfied, and now
Am resting on the power of One whose
name

Is everywhere despised. And this new life Has lifted me above all common things, And filled me with its music; and I feel That far beyond our earthly days, and death,

Is life and joy undreamed of, peace and rest,

My mother, — and the Christ of Galilee!"

She ceased; but none replied, — astonishment

Held all immovable, till Pelope,

Close nestling at her shoulder, heard a faint, Soft whisper in the darkness of the room: "Dear Lord, I have confessed thee! Oh, do

Remember me before thy Father's throne!"

The high-priest waited for the old man's word;

But Ctesiphon sat still and made no sign,— His head bowed heavily upon his hand, As if he heard not, saw not; whereupon Ione spoke again, with dignity:

"Thou hast the answer, priest, — a Christian maid

Disdains the service of a heathen shrine!"

Neocritus arose; an angry flame
Burned in his face, and flickered in his
voice:

"So be it, then! Doubtless thy words are wise,

And all the rest of Ephesus are fools, Pleased with a toy; but yet I say to thee, Beware the vengeance of the holy gods! The thunderbolts of Zeus — "

Quick, as he spoke,
A lightning flash that tore the heavens
wide

Blazed full upon their faces, and a crash
As if the very hills were shattered, rolled
And boomed around them. With a startled
cry

The trembling children caught their sister's hands

And clung about her, Lesbia gasping, "See! The gods are angry at thy evil choice!"
"Nay, Lesbia dear, fear not; they have no power

Either for good or ill." Another flash,
Another deafening peal, — and Marius stood
With folded arms and proud, uplifted head
Between the sisters and the haughty priest,
And thus addressed him: "If the gods are
wronged,

Let them avenge the insult as they will.

Thou camest for an answer, which thou hast;

What further need is yet unsatisfied?"

"Young man," the priest returned, "whatever else,

I need not thee to prompt me; and if thou Dost link thy life with hers, I need not ask For this thy rudeness greater recompense. I go, and trust my meaning will be plain Hereafter."

He was gone.

A silence fell

Upon them, deep and dread, their throbbing hearts

Filled with a nameless fear. Strange whisperings

Passed through the air above, as if the storm, Uncertain how to strike, were seeking out Each point of weakness.

But Ione marked That through all this her father had not moved;

- Alarmed at length, she swiftly crossed the room
- And knelt before him, drawing down the hand
- That held his forehead, as she gently said, "Dear Father, art thou angry? Have I
- So wrong in this? None loves thee more than I;
- Look in my face, and see!" He raised his head,
- And tears bedimmed the eyes that looked in hers;
- A long, fond gaze; a tender, trembling kiss,—
- "Could I be angry with thy mother's child?"
- "But, father, have I done a foolish thing?"
- "I know not, dear one, save it be not wise To cross the will of great Neocritus,
- As we have done to-day. But for thy faith,

Keep it, if thou art pleased; small faith have I

In aught beyond my present sight and touch.

Sit here, my daughter, till the storm is past, That I may feel thee near me."

Silently

The others clustered round them.

Far away

The murmuring voices of the upper air Swelled to a sigh, a moan; then with a roar

Weaving all lesser noises into one,

The storm came rushing on. Swiftly the clouds,

Spreading their banners black, joined rank to rank

And hurled at once their javelins thick and fast, —

A wild, resistless avalanche of rain;

And all the little wandering mountain streams

Were swollen to foaming torrents; and the trees,

Lashed by the whirlwind's fury, bowed their heads

And groaned submission to the conqueror; Fierce lightnings flashed incessantly, and loud The thunder spoke in awful majesty Unto the crouching earth; then darkness deep,

Like bird of evil omen, settled down, With mighty, outstretched wings.

Within the room

None spoke a word, till Marius' manly voice Startled their silence: "Father Ctesiphon, I know but little of Ione's faith,

And may not guess the meaning of this storm,

Unless it be a warning; but I know
That I have loved her since our childhood
days,

And whether well or ill that she has done, And punishment or not, I ask of her The greatest gift that man can ever ask. I do not fear the priest; and if the gods Should smite her to the earth, my only joy Would be to die with her in my embrace As promised wife. If thou approvest, thus I make request, despite the frown of Jove."

"Aye, Marius, it is well, if she consent."

"Ione, dearest, it is yea, - or nay?"

"Dear Marius," she began, with choking voice,

"As kind and brave as ever thou hast been, Didst thou not know that I was always thine?

I cannot give thee more than what thou hast; And yet thy life and mine should never join,

Did I not know no evil would descend
On thy dear head for aught that I have
done.

Father, thy blessing?"

Kneeling at his feet They waited for the words.

At length he sighed, -

"O unknown Powers that govern earth and sky

And time and life and death, if ye exist,
Be merciful! Be merciful to these
My children! Grant them golden years of
joy,

With love new springing at each rising sun, And intertwine the threads of life so close That at the last the fatal Severer

May not divide them,—one in life and death!"

A pause, and then he said in calmer voice, "The rain has ceased, my children; let us go

And from the housetop watch the clouds disperse."

The fresh, cool breezes fanned them in the face,

Freighted with delicate odors, as they stood And saw the scattered legions of the sky Slowly retiring,—some in sullen ranks, While others, with a new allegiance, turned And caught the colors of the conquering sun,

Flaming in gold and crimson; and the light Of victory and peace lay over all

The city and the plain. White marble walls,

Dripping with rain, reflected back the rays As from a mirror; groups of trees stood up And held aloft their foliage, brilliant green,—

Great sheaves of showery emeralds; gardens fair

Arose in terraces of sparkling grass,

With fountains, gorgeous flowers and gleaming shrines;

Above them, palaces and lofty towers Climbed to a dizzy height, enriched and

With ivory and dazzling bronze; below, Like burnished shields, lay little lakes and pools;

Westward, the harbor quivered restlessly, A glowing topaz; here the Forum shone, Yonder the Stadium; and the generous light Rolled o'er the benches of the Theatre
A cataract of gold; while in the east
The Temple glittered like a mount of snow;
And round about the city curved the plain,
All gemmed with wild-flowers, as a circlet
bright

Bent round the fair, white arm of Loveliness,—

Her shifting, shimmering veil of thinnest mist

Spread out, and floating, whispering to the sky,

"Bend lower now, and take her; she is thine!"

And Marius, smiling as he read the scene,
Drew from his tunic's folds a bracelet,
wrought

With intricate design of bird and leaf And flower, jewelled, flashing in the light, Clasped it around Ione's yielding arm, And bent his head and kissed her on the

Too happy for a word, she raised her face

With snining, moistened eyes, and tremulous lips,

And answered him in silence.

Long they stood, Clasped in each other's arms.

The sunset paled,
And shadows deepened slowly into night,
While one by one the calm, bright stars
appeared;

And downward from the deep, mysterious sky,

Like perfume dripping from an upturned vase,

Softly and sweet, descended balmy rest.

III.



WIFTLY the weeks and months had flown away,

Till once again the glad-eyed Summer stood

Close at the threshold of her kingdom fair. 'T was early morning now upon the plains Of Ephesus. A faint, gray mist upcurled From Caÿster, winding slowly toward the sea In slumbrous music, rippled by the breeze That stole through groves of oak and terebinth

And cedar, fresh and fragrant. Meadow flowers

Upraised their swaying, dew-filled cups, and smiled

To the fast paling stars, as if to say,

"O brothers, rest, and we will shine for you!"

From river margin and the pearl-hung grass

And oleander bushes and the woods

Came twittering questions of the day's advance,

While glowed the east with promise,—
amber skies

Yielding to orange, melting into gold,
Till up the gleaming pathway came the sun
In royal majesty, and touched the tops
Of Prion and Coressus, sister hills,
With magic fire; then, shooting swift and
far

His glittering arrows, pierced the lingering shades.

The crisp, delicious air was vibrant now
With wakening life, and every feathered
throat

Poured out a flood of golden melody,

And 'insects droned and chirped, while flocks and herds

Moved slowly toward the river pools to drink.

Soon city gates were opened; guards were changed;

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Some few brown, sinewy laborers appeared Upon the streets, with instruments of toil; Sellers of fruits made ready for the day; Young flower girls began to twine their wreaths,

And in an hour of sunrise all the town Hummed with a varied population. Here, Soldiers in shining armor, shaven priests, And civil officers in trailing robes; There, Jews of Palestine, or little groups Of Grecian poets and philosophers; Ladies of rank in gilded litters, borne By stalwart men, who slowly pushed their way,

Elbowing active sailors from the coasts
Of Tyre and Sidon, or thin Bedouins
From lonely Petra and the wilderness;
The dwellers by Euphrates and the Nile
Mixed with the half-clad Ethiopians;
Princes, magicians, keen-eyed merchants,
chiefs,

Barbarians of the North, brought side by side

With temple servants, artists, artisans,

Musicians, perfume-mixers, burnishers,
Or stooping water-carriers, patient beasts
Of burden, and their drivers, — slaves of all
Degree and occupation crowded close
With poor and helpless ones, who idly
gazed

Upon the busy scene, or feebly begged
For food and coins. The dwellers in the
town

Were far outnumbered by the visitors
Drawn hither by the festival and games
In honor of Diana; for the sun
Had filled the season with exuberance,
And springing grass and flowers and waving
wheat

And whispering leaves and opening buds were held

To be bright tokens of her wondrous power And condescension.

At the city gates
The throng divided, and the larger part
Hurried impatient to the Stadium;
Another company, with slower steps,

Passed in procession to the Temple, led By priests and priestesses; fair Lydian youths

And maidens, singing soft, voluptuous airs, Mingled with merry Phrygians, while here Strode a Galatian warrior, yonder one Of Cappadocia; grave, gray devotees From all the provinces of Asia moved In strange varieties of dress and speech, But with one purpose, — to propitiate The goddess for their homes.

At length they reached The open plain, and knelt adoringly, While in full view the mighty structure rose.

A terraced way led to a staircase broad, Polished and worn by countless worshippers, And from the marble platform, smooth as glass,

An hundred columns reared their stately strength,

Massive and carved, full thirty cubits high, — Many the gifts of kings, and others wrought

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By pious hands of masters in their art.

Far up, above their graceful capitals,

Cornice and frieze and architrave spread out

Stories of strife and conquest mystical,

Crowned by a roof of gleaming marble tiles;

And all the building throbbed with sculptured life,

Or glowed with splendid painting; calmeyed gods

And goddesses, or struggling Amazons,
Heroes and warriors; Hermes, mighty Zeus,
Or Pallas, Heré, Artemis herself,
And Aphrodite, Eros with his bow,
Poseidon and his trident, deities
Of stream and field *and forest; satyrs,
nymphs,

Or demigods, — as wondrous Herakles, Strongest of mortals. Here a Centaur stood; Yonder came Tritons blowing on their shells;

And all around were lions' heads, and rams, And piled up fruit, mingled with opening flowers

And twining honeysuckle. Phidias,

Praxiteles, Apelles, many more, Masters and skilful workmen; all had wrought

With far-famed architects, until there stood At Ephesus the wonder of the world And envy of all Hellas. In the midst The statue towered high,—an image rude, Yet reverenced more than all the glorious forms

By which it was surrounded. Even so
The soul of man, reaching a barren height
Unsatisfied, had waited not, but turned,
And backward traced its wandering, doubtful steps,

Till every higher faculty became
The handmaid of a lower. Grand indeed
The Temple stood, yet shrined a foolish
faith;

And even the lowest, meanest worshipper, Trembling, perhaps, in superstitious fear, Had powers greater than he gave his gods.

Rising at length, the multitude advanced, And hours were spent in sacrifice and rites Mysterious,—sacred dances, incense, chants, Till after mid-day; then the priests appeared,

With all the temple servitors again,
And followed by the people, took the road
That reached the Stadium. Musicians first,
With ringing cymbals, piercing double-flutes,
And other instruments; then girls and boys,
Singing and dancing, bearing fruits and
flowers;

And after them, Neocritus alone,— His thick, black hair uncovered to the sun, A stern, set face, thin lips, and flashing eyes, And garmented in sacrificial robes,

With heavy, lustrous folds. Behind him marched

The priests and priestesses, in ranks that spread

Across the roadway, chanting high and shrill The hymn to Artemis. And others bore Aloft upon their shoulders images

Of gold and silver; then the surging crowd Pressed forward shouting, joined along the

way

By scores belated, till they reached the arch Of entrance to the Stadium.

Then at once

The vast assemblage rose tumultuously,
And everywhere were lifted arms and scarfs,
And fluttering veils, and a great, throbbing
roar

Of eager voices:

"Artemis!"

" Behold

Great Artemis!"

" Diana!"

" Artemis!

All Asia worships thee!"

" Diana!"

" Great

Is Artemis of Ephesus!"

And spears

And swords and shields responded with a clang

That seemed to shake the building. Only one

In all that multitude was silent, one Who leaned against a pillar, faint and pale In agony of spirit, - Marius.

His men had marvelled much to see him ride Before them on that morning listlessly, The loose rein dropping from his nerveless hands.

And all unseeing where he went, his eyes Too weary for a glance, his body drooped In utter weakness. Now he stood alone, And shivered as if sickness seized him. Why?

Beneath his feet a dungeon lay; within, Close crowded in the narrow, noisome place, Were Christians; all the steadfast little church.

Alcæus, - and Ione!

On the day

The high-priest left the house of Ctesiphon, Angered that one slight girl should balk his power,

He planned revenge. A word dropped here and there,

A hint to artisans, a prophecy
Of danger should the Christians multiply
Again, as years before, at words of Paul,
A warning that the city might decline
If reverence for Artemis should fail,
Had blown the ashes of indifference
Aside and fanned the slumbering coals of
hate

Into a flame, till all at once a mob Rushed to Alcæus' house in fury, dragged The Christians forth and bound them, hurrying back

To the authorities, clamoring for their death, Which, after consultation, was decreed, Pending permission of the Emperor, As fitting climax to the festival.

In preparation.

Ctesiphon had gone With Marius impetuous to the priest, And offered gold and jewels, — anything To save Ione; but of no avail

Were all their efforts,—coldly he replied:
"Our Lady Artemis desires the hearts
As well as offerings, and it is her will
That all who mock her shall be put to
death;

Be thankful that your lives are not required, And cease to ask for her who dared despise Our holy faith!"

All hope was over now,
Unless she should recant; but from below
Faintly the sound of Christian hymns arose,
And Marius felt that none of them would
yield.

No, never! In that suffocating cave,
Darker than midnight, all were kneeling now,
Led by Alcæus in a fervent prayer.
The weary hours of day and night had
passed

Alike to them; the only light they had Glared from the lions' eyes behind the bars; Instead of heaven's sweet winds upon the brow,

The hot breath of their nostrils; and they heard

In all the pauses of the sacred song

Deep growls of hunger. Grasping each other's hands

They trembled, — but a consciousness of power

Beyond their own upheld them.

Meanwhile, games

Were going on above; the wrestlers strove And writhed for mastery, and athletes ran, As if by Hermes sandalled, for the crown; The pugilists, with heads and necks like bulls,

Rained desperate blows upon each other; then

Strong gladiators struggled for their lives, With swords and nets and tridents. And their strife

Stirred up the people as wild beasts are stirred

To savagery by the taste of blood, And all along the benches ran the words. — A murmur, rising to an awful cry, Hoarse and persistent, crueler than death,— "Bring out the Christians!"

Then a space was cleared And fenced with soldiers, and an altar placed Before a statue of the goddess, wreathed About the base with roses; and behind Were ranged the priestesses, — the Asiarch Lysanias of Smyrna in the chair Of judgment. Soon the prisoners were brought Before him, one by one, Alcœus first.

The accusation read, Lysanias asked: "Art thou a Christian?"

"Yea!"

"And dost thou know

The penalty?"

"I do."

"What madness, man, Has prompted thee to throw away thy life? Be reasonable,—curse the Christ; that done, I may release thee." "Ay, thou dost not know
That he who loses life for Christ's sweet
sake

Shall find it more abundantly. Thy power And all thou hast is given thee from him!"

"Take him away."

And hurriedly they tried
The others; but none yielded. Last of all
Ione answered to the summons. Then
The high-priest had her father brought
within,

With Lesbia and Pelope, that all Might suffer to the utmost, and prepared To read the grim indictment.

But a hand

Seized hers in shaking grasp, and in her ear Trembled the voice of Marius, changed and harsh

With deadly fear, as rapidly he said:
"Ione, dearest, listen! Leave the Christ
And call upon Diana! Take of these,"—

Catching some jewels from a casket brought By Lesbia, — "these ornaments of thine, And offer on her altar for thy life! Nay, take the bracelet, dearest, for I know That I must give thee up in life or death; But oh, thou must not die! Ione —"

" Dear - "

She slowly turned her face, all wet with tears,

And looked him in the eyes. The throng around

Bent forward eagerly to catch the words:
"My Marius, dost thou tempt my soul with
these

To leave my Master, as Iscariot did?
And even if I might, what should I care
For any life without thee? Oh, my own,
Dear father, sisters, friends, I love not life
Better than truth! The gracious Christ I
serve

Will raise me up again. Let all of you Who love me learn of him, and any death Shall only re-unite us. Marius,

Thou hast not dreamed how much I love thee yet;

But thou wilt know hereafter."

Down she drooped

Her weary head, and murmured, "O my Lord,

I thank thee for this sudden, wondrous strength,

Made perfect in my weakness!"

And a sigh

Involuntary broke from all the crowd,
As the tense bowstring, suddenly released,
Springs to its place with apprehensive thrill,
Foreseeing death in the arrow. Ctesiphon
Groaned in despair, and wrung his helpless
hands

Convulsively; and down the sisters' cheeks Tears fell like rain. But Marius staggered back,

Weak as a child, and would have fallen to earth

Had not a soldier stayed him.

Then the priest,

Unmoved, began to read the charge. But she —

Lifting her violet eyes above the throng, Above the circling thousands in the seats, Along the side of green Coressus, up

Beyond the trilling, soaring birds — at length

Rested in God's blue sky, while all of earth Seemed to dissolve away. Slowly a vision sweet

Opened before her.

For a pearly cloud

That closed one gate of heaven rolled aside,

And a bright spirit beckoned her within, — The mother's face and form; but glorious now

In such a smile as those redeemed may wear!

Then, while the glad sight filled Ione's gaze,

And scarce a breath escaped the parted lips,

Her hands close locked, in rapture keen as pain,

Suddenly all the avenue was filled

With countless flashing ones, that raised their harps

And sang triumphantly, "Ay, blest are they, The pure in heart, for they shall see their God!"

And others answered them afar, "These came

Out of great tribulation, and their robes

Are white and glistening; they are washed
in blood,

Even the Lamb's, who bears away the sin Of all the world!"

And then a splendor burned, Dazzling the wing-veiled angels; but she saw,

Even with eyelids closed, the form of One Like to the Son of Man, with hands and feet

Pierced by the cross-nails; and his thrilling voice

Rang full and tender as the far, sweet chime Of silver cymbals:

"BE THOU NOT AFRAID
OF THEM THAT KILL THE BODY, AND AFTER
THAT

Have power to do no more, — fear not, my child;

I am the resurrection and the life,
And thou shalt be with me in Paradise
To-day!"

The Asiarch, wondering at her face, Thrice questioned ere she heard him; then she said,

"Yea, I am ready!" So they led her out,—
The rude, imbruted Ethiopian slaves
Awe-struck and trembling at her confidence.—

And from the arena's sands of bloody death, She, with a score of others, entered Life.

Beneath the dust of centuries there lies
A sculptured tomb of marble, with these
words

Engraved upon the pavement: "In this $$_{\rm PLACE}$$

SLEEPS IN THE PEACE OF JESUS CHRIST THE DUST

Of Ctesiphon and Ione, side by side, Father and daughter.

"Blessed are the dead

Whose death is in the Lord; they rest from strife,

AND THEIR WORKS FOLLOW THEM.

 $\label{eq:This tomb was built}$ By Marius, a minister of Christ."





